Sheridan Foy

Period A2

**A Shade of Everything**

Ahanu used to tell me stories about the white men. He said they weren’t that much different from us. I didn’t believe him, so he told me a story. It was a story about a young girl about my age named Allison. “What kind of name is that?” I asked him.

“It’s a very common name for the white women to have,” he said with a grin. I think he enjoyed my lack of knowledge. He always did like feeling smart. And he was smart; I used to pester him every day about why he wasn’t a tribe leader like Wingina. He said he had a place in this world, and that place was with me.

I stuck my tongue out him. “Well, I think my name is better than Allison. My name is the prettiest, right, Ahanu?” I looked up at him, staring right into his soft brown eyes. Grinning again, he nodded.

“Yes, Alsoomse, your name is the prettiest.”

“Just like Mama used to say all the time, right?”

Sitting in his lap, I didn’t fail to notice how his muscles tensed, or how his eyes seemed to turn a shade darker. “Yes,” he said in a far-off voice. “Just like Hurit used to say.”

I allowed Ahanu to stare at the wall for a bit longer before bothering him with another question. “Ahanu, what is your color?”

This seemed to confuse him. He looked down into my deep brown, almost black eyes. “My what?”

“Your color!” I threw my hands up in disbelief. “ You know! Kìzis’s is *ozàwìzì*, yellow! And Mama’s was *miskozi*, red! Red like the flowers that grow by the shore!” I was reciting this by memory; I had spent countless hours talking to Mama about colors. We were fascinated with them. Why was the grass green and the river blue? Why was the dirt brown like our skin and the rocks black like the night? We went even deeper- why did we think ‘blue’ when we thought ‘sad’? Why did we think ‘black’ when we thought evil? Colors were our pastime and our work; while Ahanu was out hunting, Mama and I would lie on the shore and find every color we could. Soon we started referring to people as their color. I would recognize people by the color I associated with them. Your color was as important as your own name. In it held your personality, your identity, your strengths, your weaknesses, everything that makes up you. Yet Ahanu didn’t even know what I was talking about. “Come on, Ahanu! What’s your color?”

Whenever he thought, he cocked his head to the side slightly and looked up at the ceiling. Sometimes he’d put his hand under his chin. He usually didn’t think long, but this time he thought long and hard. “I don’t think a color is something you can say for yourself,” he said finally. “I think it’s something others come up for you.”

“Well, I think I know your color.” Mama and I had thought a lot about this one. “You’re *ojàwashkozi*, blue.” Ahanu grinned and motioned for me to continue. “But you’re not a dark river blue. You’re more of a sky blue. Usually lit up and bright by the sun but always changing in color. Sometimes you’re a stormy blue, but mostly you’re a bright blue. That’s what Mama always told me-“

“Thanks, Alsoomse.” Ahanu interrupted me, which was strange. Something was obviously bothering him. Maybe it was because I brought up Mama so often. I felt bad and didn’t say anything, letting Ahanu have some time to himself. Finally he said, “What’s your color?”

I grinned broadly with this question. “Mama-“ I quickly stopped and cleared my throat. “I mean, people tell me my color is different. It’s like no color that exists.” Excitedly, I whispered in his ear, “It’s everything.” Leaning back to watch his face’s imminent puzzlement, I explained, “I’m a shade of everything. I’m not red, or blue, or yellow. My color is all of those.” Forgetting Ahanu’s sadness at the mention of my mother, I said, “At least, Mama used to always tell me that.”

He smiled sadly. “Hurit was right. You are definitely a shade of everything.” After a pause, he asked, “Do you want to hear the rest of the story?” I nodded enthusiastically. “Okay. Allison lives with her parents in a big tribe they call London.”

“London? That’s a weird name,” I said, furrowing my brow. “I like our tribe name better.”

He grinned. “I agree. Secotan is much better. Anyway, Allison lives with her parents on a street where all the people walk. She walks on this street every day to get to school. That’s where white children go to learn so that they can work.”

“What kind of work do they do? Is it more fun than hunting?”

“Well, they do all sorts of things.” His hand gestures made it look like he was pulling examples from the air. “They build boats, they grow food, they paint-“

“Does Allison paint?”

I’m sure he expected me to ask that. Grinning, he said, “Sure, Allison paints. And she goes to school every day so that she can learn to paint better. She paints with all the colors of paints she can find. Sometimes she makes her own paint. She likes to paint London because it’s always out her window. Then when she’s finished with a painting, she shows her parents and they hang it up at home. If Allison keeps practicing, she will become the best painter in all of London.”

I looked down at my lap. “I wish I was like Allison. I wish I could go to school to paint.”

Ahanu, sensing my distress, pulled me in for a hug. “Don’t worry, my daughter. You may not get to be a painter when you get older, but I know you’ll do something big.” I looked up at him with a happier smile.

“Bigger than painting?” I couldn’t think of anything more amazing than painting.

But Ahanu nodded. “Bigger than painting.”

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*I was too young to understand. Too young to know that it wasn’t all just about what you wanted. It was about everyone else, too. And everyone else seemed to be against me.*

*The plan was set. We had provisions- enough for maybe a month or two. I hoped Ahanu would forgive me for stealing. And I hoped he’d forgive me for doing this to him. Grabbing a bag, I ran out the door. I didn’t want to look at all the people that last time. I was scared the look in my eyes would tell them what I was about to do. But maybe they wouldn’t care.*

*I ran all the way to the meeting place, right on the shore. “North shore. Look for the boat tied to a dead stump,” I had said. But I didn’t see the boat. Instead, I saw an indent in the sand about the size of a boat that rested near a rotting, green stump. And she was nowhere in sight.*

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“Ahanu! Ahanu! Ahanu!” I yelled at the top of my lungs. Though my hard running made me lose breath, still I yelled his name. “Ahanu!” I had to find him. But where would he be? “Ahanu!” I knew he was back from hunting. “Ahanu! Ahanu!” That’s it. He’s probably at home. Screaming his name, I turned sharply and started running in the direction of my house. When I walked in, I saw Ahanu looking at me worriedly. But the giggle that escaped my lips relieved him. “Ahanu, guess what!” I was still panting hard. I had been so excited to tell him the news that I didn’t even care that I had been losing air. Now, however, I was paying the price. I took a few deep gulps of air.

Letting out a breath of relief, Ahanu said, “Don’t scare me like that, Daughter. It sounded like a bear was after you.”

“Why would a bear be after me? We’re on the island, remember? I don’t think we’ve ever seen a bear here.” I grinned. “Besides, if a bear was after me, Wingina would take care of it, wouldn’t he?”

“Maybe not today.” Ahanu went back to skinning a rabbit he had caught while hunting earlier that day. “Wingina has been held up by some business. I haven’t seen him at all today.”

I eagerly interjected, “That’s what I wanted to tell you-“

“Don’t interrupt me,” Ahanu said, his eyes never leaving the rabbit. He had been like this for the past few months, and it was starting to get to me. This wasn’t the Ahanu I knew from my childhood. Something had changed. “You shouldn’t be running and screaming all over Secotan. It’s not proper.”

“And since when did you care about being proper?” I furrowed my brow. Ahanu wouldn’t have cared about this at all a year ago. What was different?

“Since you became of age. Daughter, you have to start thinking about your future. You will be *ikwe* soon. You’ll be a woman in no time at all. And once you do become a woman, you’ll have to find a husband.” The entire time he said this, his movements became slower and more meticulous. Soon he gave up and turned to look directly at me. “Look, I care for your future. I want you to be happy, Daughter-“  
 “But I don’t have to be married to be happy!” I shouted. “And stop calling me ‘Daughter’! My name is Alsoomse!” At this point, tears stung my eyes. “What happened to me having the prettiest name? What happened to being a shade of everything? What happened to you being sky blue? I guess Mama was wrong about your color!”

His face darkened, and I instantly regretted my words. Taking a step toward me, he looked down at me and said, “Don’t you *dare* talk to me about Hurit that way. Don’t you ever talk to me about her. She’s dead and there’s nothing you or me can do about it!” His voice quivered and was raised to a shout.

Almost to the point of sobbing and not knowing what else to do, I turned and ran. I just wanted to get away from him. Someone else could tell him that white men landed on the opposite end of the island today. I didn’t even care anymore.

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*“Where is it.” It wasn’t a question. It was a statement. But either way, I needed an answer.*

*“What are you talking about?” Ahanu didn’t meet my eyes. He was hiding something.*

*“You know exactly what I’m talking about. The boat. Where. Is. It.”*

*Ahanu seemed thrown off by my words. “A boat? You have a* boat*?” He stood up to face me. “You aren’t leaving this island, Daughter. You’re staying here with me. You know what they do to us-“*

*“They wouldn’t. Not to me. Or Numees.”*

*Ahanu raised an eyebrow. “Numees? ‘Sister’? Alsoomse, what is going on?”*

*“Just tell me where the boat is and you won’t have to care about me anymore.” I couldn’t look into his eyes anymore. My harsh words were killing him, and it killed me to know I was doing this to him. But it was necessary.*

*“I don’t know where the boat is,” he said. “Perhaps* she *took it.”*

*“Numees wouldn’t take the boat. Why would she?”*

*Ahanu turned away. Something was wrong.*

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We had had contact with white men before, but these men we couldn’t handle.

I was excited that the white men had chosen Roanoke Island as their new home. I thought maybe I’d be able to talk to them to see what they’re really like. I wondered if one of them was named Allison and painted. But none of them were girls like me. They were all rough, soldier-type men, especially their chief. They called him Lane, but I called him by his color: Makadewìzì, black. He was a terrible, terrible man. When Ahanu was out hunting, I’d climb the trees by their square tribe to look over their walls.

Ahanu was wrong about them being like us. The white men had skin that was so pale I didn’t know how they survived Roanoke’s weather- it’s usually so hot and humid. I imagined they would burn and shrivel up in the heat, but they didn’t. They were also mean and ruthless. Makadewìzì didn’t seem to like any of us Secotans or any of the other tribes. Whenever he talked about us, he called us Indians. I’m not sure where he got this name, but we were definitely not “Indians”.

Makadewìzì and his tribe were devils in most of my tribe’s opinion. They caused a lot of trouble on the mainland: they burned Aquacogoc, they invaded Chawanoac, and they took the son of Chief Menatonon. “Why do you think the white men are so mean to us?” I asked Ahanu.

He shrugged and said, “They believe white skin is better than every other color. They think our dark skin is a sign of inhumanity.”

“But it’s not!” I protested. I wanted to tell him that it’s your true color that matters, not your skin color, but I thought it would just bring up memories of Mama and put Ahanu in another one of his moods. I stayed quiet and grumpily stomped away. I was just glad the white men hadn’t attacked us yet.

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*My eyes widened with horror. I shook my head in disbelief. “No…They wouldn’t!”*

*His hand was on my shoulder, and his eyes showed only kindness. “Daughter…I’m sorry. The tribe is only doing what it feels is best.”*

*“Best for whom? Do they think this is best for me?” I couldn’t stop myself from tearing up. “Do they not understand how much she means to me?”*

*“No one can understand. It is a bond that surpasses the understanding of even me.” He sighed. “Daughter… No, not Daughter. Alsoomse, I always knew you were meant for something more. This is your chance to do something big. And if that means leaving the island… then you have my approval.” He embraced me as if I was still a little girl. “This is your chance. Go.” With that word, he pushed me away. I nodded at him and then, taking one look back, I ran.*

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It was late fall, and Ahanu and I were packing. Every winter, us Secotans split up into our families. It’s tradition. I never liked it, because I ended up missing everyone all winter.

Wingina had already left. He was spending winter in Dasemunkepeuc, a mainland tribe. Many of us went to the mainland, too, but very few spent the winter in a different tribe. Ahanu and I always stayed on the island, moving just a little bit west of Secotan. We usually didn’t see any other Secotans, so we had no competition for food.

We packed in silence. Ahanu’s new behavior wasn’t going away any time soon. I was scared I’d never see the old Ahanu again. I thought maybe some sort of discussion would bring him back. “Ahanu, what’s it like to have a sister?”

“Don’t call me Ahanu. I am your father and deserve respect.”

I sighed. “Fine. Father, what’s it like to have a sister?”

“I wouldn’t know. I didn’t have any siblings.” Ahanu wasn’t even looking at me.

“Well, I think it would be great,” I said, even though I knew Ahanu didn’t care. “I’ve always wanted a younger sister. I’d have someone to play with, someone to look at colors with, someone to *talk to*.” My emphasis was lost on Ahanu. He just grunted in acknowledgement, though I was sure he wasn’t listening. I went back to packing. I was deciding whether I should bring the red or the blue garment when Kìzis ran in.

Kìzis, while a good friend, was someone I rarely spoke to. His father grew corn and pumpkin and whatever was in season like most of the tribe while Ahanu hunted. And our gender differences didn’t help our friendship blossom, either. We used to play together often when we were little, but now that we were older, we had no time for playing.

When Kìzis entered, he almost ran right into me. He may have been skinny, but he was tall, and I definitely didn’t want all seventy seven inches of him falling on top of me. “Oh, um s-sorry, Alsoomse.”

Ahanu’s attention was caught. “Something wrong, Kìzis? Where’s your family?”

“Packing as well, but we just got terrible news.” He sighed. “Wingina is dead.”

Ahanu and I didn’t comprehend what he said for a moment. “Dead?” I finally asked. “But how? Was he sick? Or…” I trailed off.

Kìzis looked down at his shoes. “It was the white men. They invaded Dasemunkepeuc. It had something to do with Wingina going there. They thought Wingina was going to attack them…”

“Wingina wouldn’t attack them!” I exclaimed. “He would never…”

I couldn’t listen to the rest of their conversation. Wingina was dead... because of the white men. What else would the white men do?

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*The tribe was stirring. The sounds of riot were in the air. They were going to riot against Numees. That I knew, but they hadn’t gathered yet. Why hadn’t they gathered yet? As I thought of all the possibilities, my heart sank. What if they already had Numees? But there was still the possibility they were just slow. Maybe I could stop them. So I did the only thing I’ve ever done to get someone’s attention.*

*Running at breakneck pace, I screamed at the top of my lungs, “She’s not here! She’s not here! Njlon is not here!”*

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I could feel a storm brewing the day the white men left. I watched, hidden in the boughs of a tree, as the men packed up their things and left. I was glad to see them go; I didn’t want them on our island anymore. Especially after what they did to Wingina.

A man named Drake came to take them home. He had the biggest boats I’d ever seen in my life, and there were so many of them! However, I couldn’t get a very good look at them since they had to stay in deep water away from the shore. I saw Drake come to the island in a rowboat with a few other men. After a very long discussion with Makadewìzì, Drake returned to the rowboat to row back to his large boats. Makadewìzì snapped at the other white men, and soon everyone was in a frenzy to pack as much as they could. I was so interested in their fervor that I didn’t notice Drake return with more rowboats, this time filled not with white men but other people, too. I was shocked to find they lacked the pale skin of the white men; they had dark skin like me. Darker, even. When they were brought to the shore, they were ordered out of the rowboats. A bit dazed and confused, they continued to mill about around the now empty rowboats. Amidst the confusion and frenzy of packing, I picked out one of the dark-skinned ones that seemed to stand out among the rest. She was the only girl out of all of them. Unlike the others, her face displayed confidence despite the situation she was in. I assumed they were enslaved by Drake. But why were these slaves brought to the island?

I soon discovered why. Drake’s men and Makadewìzì’s men were loading the freshly packed luggage onto the boats, and after all of the men climbed in as well. All of the men except the slaves and the girl. I couldn’t believe it. They had brought the slaves to make room for the white men. They didn’t even leave them with food. They were just left to die. Something told me I couldn’t let that happen. After tossing out some of their luggage, the white men began rowing back to the large ships. As soon as they were out of sight, the slaves all moved simultaneously. Some took one of the abandoned rowboats left by Drake. A few wandered off into the woods. But the girl didn’t leave. She began rummaging through the ruins of the abandoned white men’s tribe. Soon the girl was alone.

Moving as quietly as I could, I slid down the trunk of my tree. The girl didn’t seem to notice the noise I was making. Walking slowly and deliberately, I crept around the sharp logs of woods that were set as walls. I didn’t want to startle the girl, so I called out to her from a distance. “Hey!” I called.

The girl wasn’t startled. She slowly turned around, as if preparing to face an opponent. Seeing that it was only me, she relaxed a bit. I was on my guard; Ahanu had always told me not to trust someone who is not a Secotan until you’ve affirmed that the person is trustworthy. She sensed my tension and tensed up as well. Slowly, we walked toward each other, taking each step carefully as if one wrong step would send the other running away. Soon we were close enough to touch each other. I stuck my hand out to make peace. She eyed it as if it was a foreign thing before carefully sticking her hand out as well. I touched my palm to hers.

It was then something happened- a bond was formed, one that would be tested and tugged on. One that would experience pain and suffering yet someday heal. “Alsoomse,” I told her, pointing to myself. I then pointed to her and said, “I’ve always wanted a sister. You will be Numees.” And Numees nodded.

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*I had stopped the mob from forming for now. But Numees was missing, and I had to find her as soon as possible. And a new boat, for that matter.*

*A sudden thought entered my head. Why was the boat missing, too? It was tied to the stump, I remembered. Yet there was no boat to be seen. The tide wasn’t high enough to even make it float. The only explanation was that the boat was taken. And Numees was missing.*

*It didn’t take long for me to put two and two together.*

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Numees had come home with me the night we met. I mean, where else could she go? And I couldn’t help feeling we had some sort of connection that we just couldn’t ignore. It was as if it was destiny for us to meet. I hadn’t felt this connected to anyone since Mama.

However, Ahanu didn’t agree with Numees being in our house. I tried explaining to him. “Ahanu, she was left by the white men. I couldn’t just leave her all alone-“

“If the white men left her, then we should leave her, too. What if she’s just like them?” He pointed an accusing finger right at Numees. Poor Numees didn’t understand a word we were saying and just stared at the finger two inches away from her face.

“But she’s not! Please, can you just let her stay? She won’t cause any trouble.”

Ahanu thought for only ten seconds before he made his decision. “Fine, she can stay only if-“ But his words were cut off by my victory yells. I grabbed Numees’s hands and jumped up and down. Numees just smiled.

“Please, Daughter, don’t be so loud. Now please be careful. The tribe might not be so…accepting of a foreigner like her in our tribe.”

Ahanu had no idea how true that statement was. While I was totally accepting of my adoptive sister, no one else seemed to be. Even Ahanu acted as if he disapproved of it when talking with his peers. I never told the tribe her name, so they came up with one for her: Njlon. Mistress. I couldn’t believe how immature my tribe was being. But it was only the start.

Three large boats arrived one day. Numees and I watched the men come to the shore from a nearby tree. I was able to gather that the captain’s name was Grenville. He seemed to be looking for something. I thought maybe he was looking for the white men’s tribe, but of course they were long gone. Despite this, the captain left fifteen of his men on the island. Perhaps they were there to look for the tribe? The men huddled together as if they were frightened. What were they frightened of? There was no danger here, unless you counted my tribe as dangerous. But we wouldn’t attack the white men.

Suddenly I heard a noise. Numees heard it, too, and she tensed. She knew what it was. Pointing, she showed me a group of men running towards the white men. As they ran closer, I saw that they were some of the Secotan hunters. The second I saw their spears in the air, I knew Numees and I had to get out of there. As soon as they had passed our tree, we slid down the trunk and ran as fast as we could home.

I tried to ignore the stories of our men sending the white men fleeing in their rowboats to who knows where, but it was hard when it was all everyone was talking about. Everyone was agitated about the white men and foreigners in general. Sensing the danger Numees was now in, Ahanu suggested that she and I find a new place for her to sleep at night for her own safety. I just hoped that the whole ordeal would die down. I didn’t want Numees to get hurt.

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*I had to face facts. Numees had taken the boat and left. She had ignored our plans of leaving together to escape Secotan and the tribe’s dissent of our friendship.*

*I sat in the tree that overlooks the white men’s tribe. A second one had been established here, but, like its predecessor, it was abandoned. As I sat in a comfortable position among the branches, I couldn’t help but sob. My sister was gone. Why? Why would she leave me?*

*Suddenly, I heard voices. They were white men voices. Looking down, I saw that a new boat had arrived. It was White, chief of the second white men’s tribe. Why had he returned? He stepped onto the sandy soil slowly, as if weighted down by a feeling of dread. I suddenly realized that he didn’t know that his tribe had left. He had left so long ago that I had forgotten. It was a puzzle to us Secotans why a chief would leave his tribe- our only explanation was “They’re white, so they’re different.”*

*I watched as White surveyed the site. He seemed…troubled, and saddened. Were white men capable of such emotions? I had never seen such a display. I watched as the emotionally unstable man stumbled upon a marking on a trunk that used to be part of the wall of the tribe. From my position, I could barely read what it said: CROATOAN. Looking around, he seemed to have found another marking. This one simply read: CRO. I didn’t know what the letters meant, but it certainly meant something to White.*

*Watching him, I couldn’t help but wonder what color White was. The first answer I thought of was* wàbizì, *white, but that wasn’t true. I knew from experience that skin color wasn’t your true color. I remembered Mama telling me my color. “You are a shade of everything,” she had said, smiling down at me. A shade of everything. How could I forget that? How could I sit in this tree in my self-pity and not remember who I am? I’m a shade of everything. I shouldn’t be sitting in this tree. I should be doing something. And so the shade of everything stood and walked home, knowing she was prepared for anything.*